Teaching Communication Behaviors/Skills Related to Cultural Diversity in the Basic Course Classroom

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Basic course educators find themselves responsible for a number of new and often difficult curricular decisions that come from the awareness of changing student populations and needs. The impetus for curricular change based on response to cultural diversity issues differs somewhat from some curriculum movements in recent history. Most waves of curricular modification occur after and as a response to some disruptive event such as the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, the launching of Sputnik, the passage of the GI Bill. In the present case, educators are not put in a position of damage control or crises management. Although some institutions have policies that call for implementation of multicultural curricular changes, faculty within their own content areas have a fair amount of autonomy in altering their curricula to fit the needs of their students today and tomorrow (Swanson, 1992).

**NEED FOR CURRICULAR CHANGES RELATED TO CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

A look at the faces in our classrooms each term tells us we are in the midst of a changing mosaic of students with changing needs. In addition, national boundaries no longer limit the future business partners and competitors with whom our
Teaching Behaviors/ Skills Related to Cultural Diversity

students will interact to colleagues with similar cultural backgrounds (Thrush, 1993). No one doubts the face of America is changing and that communicating in the cultural mixture of the twenty-first century will call for exceedingly high levels of flexibility, knowledge, and wisdom.

The purpose of this essay is to present suggestions for basic course directors and teachers interested in introducing multicultural information and/or skills instruction into their courses. First, a general process for curricular change will be presented. Then, instructional issues central to teaching communication behaviors and/or skills will be discussed.

GENERAL PROCESS FOR CURRICULAR CHANGE

It is worthwhile for those responsible for basic course decisions to look at three aspects of the course before making decisions about specific content, skills, and instructional strategies. Three general areas that form the foundation for the more specific decisions are: target audience, learning objectives, and types of learning.

Target Audience to Cultural Diversity Instruction

Obviously not all basic course situations are the same. Some classrooms are culturally homogeneous. Other classes are culturally diverse. In still other classrooms, a limited number of students representing national and ethnic groups other than Anglo-U.S. students are present. The makeup of the student population influences how educators considering multicultural instruction interpret their task. The literature suggests that educators may see their responsibility as either (1) preparing a fairly homogenous, usually Anglo-U.S., popu-

BASIC COMMUNICATION COURSE ANNUAL

http://ecommons.udayton.edu/bcca/vol8/iss1/12
Teaching Behaviors / Skills Related to Cultural Diversity

Teaching Behaviors / Skills Related to Cultural Diversity 147

lation to live in a more culturally diverse world (Araujo, Jensen, & Kelley, 1991; Braithwaite & Braithwaite, 1991; Broome, 1991; Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, & Wiseman, 1991; Koester & Lustig 1991; Kudirka, 1989; Ostermeier, 1992; Swanson, 1992; Supnick, 1991; Thrush, 1993; Wittmer, 1992) or (2) aiding students who are new to the established culture in adapting to the culture of the classroom and campus (Flores, 1992; Jones, 1985).

Although recommendations for instruction are presented in the literature from these two different perspectives, the reality is that the same over-arching goals apply for both cases. Lervold (1993) explains, "After sincere reflection, it is clear that no significant differences exist. Instructors working within culturally diverse classrooms, and multicultural communication professors alike, must strive to comprehend and affirm effective communication principles/strategies that support the needs of all their students . . ." (p. 5). Lervold is suggesting that sensitivity to cultural diversity in the classroom begins with the instructor.

Learning Objectives

Lervold's (1993) statement is a good place to begin thinking about educators' learning goals for their students. The basic assumption for any curricular decisions for a basic course should be: Changes must provide an opportunity for learning that is beneficial for students. The student may not recognize the benefits; the learning may not even deliver those benefits, but the intent should be instruction that enhances the students' lives in and out of the classroom, in the present and in the future.

The unique composition of the classroom audience and the interest and expertise of the instructor will certainly influence what these goals will be. The goals might range from fairly modest learning changes such as students' understanding the
concept of "culture" to changes as difficult and complex as achieving communication competency in intercultural situations.

**Categories of Learning**

Gudykunst, et al. (1991) suggest that an introductory intercultural communication course "ideally should include cognitive, affective, and behavioral components." Although Gudykunst, et al. are discussing the introductory intercultural communication course, the premise is applicable to the basic communication course as well. Kudirka (1989) emphasizes the importance of this same combination. "Cross-cultural communication is an integrated package of knowledge, skill, ability and attitude . . . . It provides a way to know what to expect and how to interact when you live and work with people from other cultures" (p. 3).

Both Araujo, et al. (1991) and Braithwaite and Braithwaite (1991) focused on affective and cognitive learning in the basic course in their articles related to implementing multicultural instruction. Depending on the learning goals for the course, the basic course educator may wish to limit instruction to these two realms. However, because of the strong skills component in many of our courses, it is probable that, if not now, at some point in the future, many basic course programs will create goals that require instruction leading to behavior and skills learning. Most educators would agree that the development and refinement of skills and behaviors is based on and must begin with affective and cognitive learning, which leads us back to the inclusion of all three learning realms in our curricular plans.
SKILLS AND BEHAVIORAL LEARNING

Distinction Between Skills and Behavior

Most basic communication courses emphasize skills acquisitions and behavioral changes as central outcomes in one or more of the three following areas: public speaking, interpersonal communication, or small group communication. The relationship of skills instruction and behavioral change needs to be clarified before we consider how basic course teachers can approach multicultural learning in the behavioral domain.

Skills learning is only one possible route to behavioral change. Certainly behaviors may also be altered by gaining new information or changing attitudes. Skills instruction in the classroom is usually initiated by presentation of a description of the behavior, often incorporating a list of "do's" and "don'ts" and/or by introduction of a list of sequential steps one follows to produce the behavior. In public speaking classes, processes to produce speeches are often highly structured and codified. Even in more spontaneous interpersonal and small group situations, students, for example, study sequential processes of conflict resolution or problem solving. The student uses the behavior or process descriptions to create a tentative behavior. Then, through guided practice and corrective feedback, the student refines the behavior.

Behavioral learning that does not rely on skills learning is apt to be more self directed. Students may discover the process or "rules" on their own and provide their own corrective feedback as they use a trial-and-error process. Other behavioral changes may require little or no practice or refinement, but occur because of the desire to perform the behavior or the recognition that it is an appropriate and effective behavior.
When basic course educators commit themselves to incorporating behavioral/skills instruction in their classes, they face a new set of unique problems. They face the triple mysteries of what cultures to include, what skills to teach, and how to teach them. Fortunately, other scholars and practitioners have been searching for clues as to how to solve these mysteries.

**Organizational Scheme**

Literature that follows reports are organized to address the questions raised above of what cultures to select and how to teach behaviors and skills for culturally diverse situations. Information about instructional approaches from studies and texts have been initially divided into two categories: culture-general and culture-specific. The experiences and recommendations of authors who have used each approach provide insights into how to handle the dilemmas related to selecting cultures for study. Gudykunst, et al. (1991) explain the two approaches. The culture-general approach "involves a focus on the general factors that influence communication between people from different cultures and/or ethnic groups" (p. 274). In contrast, the culture-specific approach provides description and information about the communication expectations and behaviors of a specific culture and includes recommendations for how one might interact with members of that culture. Either approach or the two in combination might be utilized to promote affective and cognitive learning goals.

The final section, labeled "experiential learning/training" presents information related to teaching strategies. Two options are presented. The first, experiential learning, is based on direct, firsthand experiences and interactions with those from cultures other than one's own (Lervold, 1993). The training approach involves direct instruction by a teacher or trainer in order to learn communication skills. It should be
noted that teachers may choose either the culture-general approach or the culture-specific approach in determining whether to focus on skills and behaviors applicable to any culture or the skills and behaviors that apply to one culture.

**Cultural-General Approach Leading to Behavior**

This approach can be recommended because it does not force the instructor to choose the appropriate behaviors for one or a limited number of cultures. Instead students build a repertoire of skill or behavior strategies that can then be applied to specific situations. This is the approach Broome (1991) recommends for developing empathy in situations of cultural diversity. He suggests that if one approaches real interactional experiences with a mental frame of relational empathy rather than an egocentric template, students will, through experimentation, discover the "rules" of empathic communication for different cultures. Ostermeier (1992) also relies on face-to-face interaction of students from different cultures to promote learning about communication related to values systems.

Flores (1992) uses a culture-general approach to teach problem solving skills in multicultural groups. Although in this case a general guide is given for problem solving, the specifics of how different cultures operationalize the components of problem solving is discovered during the process. Unlike the direct experiential learning suggestions of Broome, Ostermeier, and Flores, Supnick (1991) has utilized culture-general learning in a business communications course through the indirect experiential approach of case studies and simulations.

From the technical writing field, Thrush (1993) points out that the cultural differences in such areas as graphic placement, logic, acceptability of evidence, and organization of...
Teaching Behaviors / Skills Related to Cultural Diversity

written and oral products require that competent communicators become aware of the preferred choices and adapt their writing and formatting for specific cultures. However, instead of suggesting that the culture-specific approach be used, Thrush proposes that the communicator use a list of the following five factors to analyze the needs and preferences of any culture: (1) world experience, (2) the amount of common knowledge shared within a culture, (3) the hierarchical structure of society and workplace, (4) culturally specific rhetorical strategies, and (5) cultural differences in processing graphics (p. 274). Those who teach the basic course, especially if it includes public speaking, might find this a useful heuristic for students to use in collecting information about communication behaviors for specific cultures.

Perhaps the most ambitious application of the culture-general approach is W. Barnett Pearce's text Interpersonal Communication: Making Social Worlds (1994). Pearce rejected the choice to write "an integrative textbook including all the topics taught under the rubric of interpersonal communication" (p. xv) and instead chose to "write a distinctive book that takes what I consider to be the most powerful concepts in the field and make them available for students." In his book-long conversation with students, great chunks are about or build on the subject of culture. Pearce guides the readers to think about the concepts that seem to be universal rather than those that are culture specific. He stimulates the reader to question past conclusions that imply universality for interpersonal behaviors and recommendations. For example, he shares with students his hunch that Knapp and Vangelisti's model of interactional stages "is most accurate in describing romantic relationships among adolescents and young adults in contemporary Western societies or those influenced by Western societies" (p. 242). Then Pearce suggests that students interview students and representatives from diverse backgrounds to see if their romantic and nonromantic relationships follow the model.
In an attempt to respond to the need to develop new behaviors for diverse audiences, many public speaking texts have taken a culture-general approach in emphasizing audience analysis and adaptation, pointing out that speakers need to learn about the backgrounds of audience members and tailor messages to audience members that may represent diverse cultures.

Part of the difficulty in adapting public speaking instruction to a variety of cultural needs is the typical skills approach that prescribes uniform process steps and performance expectations. Casmir (1991) identifies the limitations of such "laundry-list" skills instruction in the public speaking and interpersonal areas when one is trying to create a course that prepares students for communication with representatives of a variety of cultures. Casmir writes "she or he who would speak or become interactively involved in intercultural efforts must know many things, and must not be satisfied with merely learning a set of techniques, or gathering a 'bag of rhetorical tricks'" (p. 233).

The public speaking text *Between One and Many* by Brydon and Scott (1994), approaches behavior change through the cognitive and affective realms. These authors have quietly integrated information and applications that seem to come out of an acceptance that cultural diversity is here and since a variety of cultural backgrounds and experiences are an integral part of student's past, present, and future, we should simply make that reality an integral part of how we study communication. This public speaking text has a section on Rhetorical Sensitivity that inevitably and naturally includes a sub-section on appreciating Human Diversity and a section on Language that inevitably and naturally includes a sub-section on Language and Culture. Likewise the "delivery" section address Multicultural Nonverbal Diversity. These do not read like afterthoughts or the obligatory treatment of the subject, but, again, are inevitable and natural inclusions.
A second public speaking text that provides students with knowledge about public-speaking-related communication from a variety of cultures is Gamble and Gamble's *Public Speaking in the Age of Diversity* (1994). Within each major step of the speechmaking process, the authors have included special sections labeled "Considering Diversity." These sections include information about cultural expectations, recommendations for applying new insights or information to the speaking situation, and discussion questions. The authors have incorporated both the culture-general and culture-specific approaches.

**Culture-Specific Approach Leading to Behavior**

Some writers seem quite confident that culture-specific skills acquisition for multicultural communication is appropriate and feasible. Typical of this viewpoint are authors who represent the business and organizational community. Kudirka (1989) chooses a culture-specific approach in which company trainers instruct business representatives in the appropriate interpersonal behaviors and skills applicable to business transactions with representatives from a target culture. She acknowledges that skills training is an "ongoing process" that "requires a strong long-term commitment on the part of the employer" (p. 6). It is improbable that such in-depth culture-specific training would be practical for students in a basic course; however, using a training approach for working toward limited skill development might be possible.

Swanson (1992) believes skills sensitization and practice should be part of the organizational communication curriculum. Students should learn the appropriate criteria with which to evaluate skills from a variety of cultures. She recommends an experiential learning approach that may fit under either the culture-general or the culture-specific...
approach, and that engages students in activities with representatives of diverse cultures through tutoring or projects in local businesses that have diverse work forces or expertise in international business.

Many recent interpersonal and group texts have included specific sections describing communication behaviors and expectations from specific cultures such as the African-American culture and the Japanese culture. Specific gender communication behaviors are also frequently described.

The Gamble and Gamble (1994) text described above also pinpoints public speaking information that is culture specific. However, for the most part, public speaking texts continue to present only one model of public speaking and imply that the linear, logical, factual evidence approach to public speaking is what students need to know and be able to execute. An exception is a text published several years ago, *Communicating: A Social and Career Focus* by Berko, Wolvin and Wolvin (1981) that did provide the opportunity for students to become aware of alternative approaches to logic and reasoning by including sections on Theological Reasoning and Eastern Philosophy.

Even if the basic course does not include skills training for alternative models of public speaking, Koester and Lustig (1991) make the point that part of our responsibility as communication educators is to teach students that "skills taught to improve communication within the context of Anglo U.S. culture may not necessarily be appropriate within other U.S. (and international) cultural contexts" (p. 253).

**CONCLUSIONS AND APPLICATION**

The experiences of writers presented in the literature suggest a number of directions for faculty interested in meeting the communication behavior/skills needs of students in a culturally diverse classroom or society. The first implication is that basic course planners should look for texts that use the
concept of culture as a foundational means of looking at communication. The search for an appropriate text should not be limited to those mentioned in this essay. There are many authors and publishers who are trying to meet our needs in this area. The choice of a text for the basic communication course and whether it uses the culture-general approach or the culture-specific approach is up to the faculty.

A second suggestion is to create situations where students experience communication with individuals from cultures other than their own. These exchanges result in both culture-general and culture-specific learning and may lead to behavioral implications. Students can be guided to become field researchers on their campuses and in their communities. Through real encounters among people from diverse backgrounds discussing questions of significance to all, students can both collect information and practice skills of meaningful intercultural dialogue. On some campuses, teachers may have to rely on role playing or simulations if the opportunities to meet and talk with representatives from a variety of cultures is limited. These experiential approaches can be partnered with assignments that help students learn how to locate information and apply their finding to whatever new cultural challenges come their way.

One other approach is to incorporate an assignment as a part of a basic public speaking course that combines the culture-general and culture-specific approaches with experiential learning. (See Appendix 1.) The assignment requires students to research public speaking practices from a specific culture of their choice and then present an informative speech that shares their finding with the other students. Students have the options of interviewing a representative of their chosen culture about public speaking practices, analyzing speeches from the culture, or reading description of the practices in journal articles. In the students' next speaking assignment, they have to choose three behaviors from their chosen culture and incorporate those in either the construc-
tion or presentation of the speech. They inform the audience of the practices they have chosen and give the instructor a card delineating those behaviors. If the practices are inconsistent with the usual speech-making practices of the course, the standard criteria for evaluation in that area do not apply.

Students have found this an interesting assignment and believe that they have learned not only more about public speaking practices in more than one culture, but also now have a start on how to research and apply those practices to their speech making.

In addition to the suggestions above, there is a final possibility, to follow Pearce's lead and search for those important concepts that cross cultural boundaries. No doubt learning to live in a diverse population means looking for differences and respecting those difference, but surely it should also mean looking for commonalties. Perhaps this dual vision is an important component in fulfilling the learning objects for students who live in a culturally diverse world.

REFERENCES


APPENDIX 1
ALTERNATIVE PUBLIC SPEAKING MODELS

Directions to the Student: The following assignment description is distributed to students.

This assignment involves your next two speeches. The first speech will be an oral report based on research about expectations and practices related to public speaking in a culture other than the one that you think of as your culture. You will research public speaking in another culture by at least two of the following three means.

(1) You may study and analyze the presentation of a speech. You may attend a live performance or use a taped speech. If you choose the live alternative, I would suggest audio-taping the speech if possible for additional study. The video tapes of Landon Lectures in Farrell Library include female speakers, African-American speakers, Latino speakers, Israeli speakers and probably other cultural representatives I do not know about.

(2) You may interview a member of the culture you have chosen to learn about in order to discover audience expectations and speaker and speech conventions in the culture. There are many international students on campus and representatives of a variety of cultures in Manhattan, Junction City and at Fort Riley.

(3) You may read about public speaking in the chosen culture from journal articles and convention papers. I can point you to specific articles and ways to go about finding the articles.
Some features of public speaking that may follow unique patterns include: voice and body behaviors during presentation, language choices and patterns, topic choices, organization, support for claims, reasoning, persuasive appeals, ritualistic elements. This list is meant to get you started on your analysis and research, not to limit your discoveries.

For the second speech, you may choose any topic and any audience outcome goal. However, in planning and presenting the speech, you must implement three practices or features that are characteristic of public speaking in the culture you have studied. Before the speech, inform the classroom audience of the elements from another culture you plan to incorporate in your speech and also turn in a card listing the elements.